

# **CAIRNGORMS DEER ADVISORY GROUP**

**Minutes of 'CDAG Special' meeting held on**

**Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

**at**

**Mar Lodge, Braemar**

## **Present**

Michael Hone (Chair), Will Boyd-Wallis, , Alasdair Colquhoun, Jamie Williamson, Mike Cottam, Dick Balharry, Simon Blackett, John Bruce, Justin Irvine, Colin McClean, Colin Sheddon, Chris Donald, Hamish Trench, Kevin Simpson, Alastair Gemmell, Robbie Kernahan, Colin Lavin, Kevin Pearce, Desmond Dugan, David Frew, Richard Cooke, Thomas MacDonell, Jochen Langbein, Karen Archer, Simon Fairclough, Penny Lawson (minutes).

## **1. Welcome and apologies.**

Apologies received from:

Ewan Cameron, Caroline Warburton, Alix Whitaker, Andrew Thin, Duncan Bryden, Jane Hope, Katrina Farquhar, Roger Clegg.

## **2. Introduction and overview of recent CDAG activity**

Invitations to this 'special' meeting of CDAG had been extended beyond the usual CDAG membership to members of all the Deer Management Groups covering the National Park which include a range of estates with diverse objectives. The purpose of the meeting was to take stock of recent progress in deer management and to focus on two pertinent topics, deer fencing and deer collisions.

The role, aims and membership of CDAG were explained and some of its achievements highlighted, including:

- Publication of 'Deer Framework for the National Park' setting out the widely agreed vision for deer management. The latest review of progress is available on the CDAG web pages.
- Spatial mapping of different estates' deer management aspirations alongside deer counts, useful to indicate issues and opportunities and as a tool for discussion
- Research on Sika deer hybridisation, recent results having shown no evidence of hybridisation in the Monadhliath

By way of introduction to the presentations on fencing, the main reasons for deer fencing were outlined, i.e. to manage deer for woodland regeneration/planting and as part of grouse moor tick management methods. Potential areas of conflict were briefly explained. The solutions are not always obvious and there are often many ways of using fencing in different and innovative ways, or using alternatives to fences, to achieve multiple objectives. Examples where woodland expansion has been achieved without fencing were used to illustrate this, and it was recognised that great steps forward have been made on both public and privately held land.

The increasing importance of the issue of deer collisions and the need for expert advice were noted. This issue is especially relevant to plans for the dualling of the A9.

### **3. Deer Fencing**

Robbie Kernahan (Director of Wildlife Operations, SNH) provided an overview of the joint agency guidance on deer fencing. This document seeks to promote best practice and assist both private individuals and public sector agencies in deciding whether to fund and/or permit deer fencing. Deer fencing can serve a useful purpose for controlling deer movements, helping to achieve environmental objectives and preventing deer causing a public hazard. The guidance sets out a process for identifying, assessing and mitigating the negative impacts deer fences on the following 5 areas of public interest.

- Public Safety
- Deer Welfare
- Biodiversity
- Landscape and cultural heritage
- Access

Richard Cooke (Chairman, Association of Deer Management Groups) welcomed the joint agency guidance, stating that Deer Management groups have the difficult job of reconciling potentially conflicting objectives. Many of those are to do with deer fencing or lack of it. “Some individuals and organisations will not currently consider fencing as an option which means reducing deer populations to a level which may allow regeneration but is insufficient to meet the objectives of neighbours. Conversely some landholdings refuse to consider population reductions which might reduce the case for fencing while still delivering a sustainable deer harvest. Neither position is sustainable when it comes to the sharing of a common resource: If your policies are detrimental to your neighbours they are not reasonable or fair”.

Robbie Kernahan’s presentation and Richard Cooke’s notes will be available in the CDAG web pages: <http://cairngorms.co.uk/look-after/deer/cdag>

The main points raised during discussion were as follows.

The 2004 Joint Agency Statement on deer fencing was revisited. The changed Scottish Government policy (implemented through the altered stance of SNH and

FCS) from a presumption against fencing to a more flexible approach taking into account a range of interests was recognised and welcomed.

There are alternatives to standard 2m deer fences which can be cheaper and avoid negative landscape and biodiversity impacts. Eg electric fence used at Abernethy is effective to exclude most of the deer most of the time.

Where there is conflict between the objectives of neighbouring landowners, respect and effective negotiation are essential to achieve a fair outcome. Policies and actions must be reasonable and not detrimental to neighbours. Strategic thinking and collaboration between neighbours, rather than a piecemeal approach to fencing, can lead to improved efficiency and cost savings.

Most fences are relatively temporary but a high standard of maintenance is still essential.

By using fencing to allow different deer densities in different areas, sporting resources can be preserved and sporting income increased leading to local socio-economic benefit. However, Glenfeshie was used as an example where sporting income has been maintained despite a large reduction in deer density to allow woodland regeneration without fencing.

There are no official planning requirements for new fences (unless within 20m of a public road), however there is a need for consultation with relevant agencies especially in the case of designated areas, and following good practice guidance is encouraged. It was noted that it is sometimes overlooked that the National Park as a whole is a designated area. There are specific regulations for electric fences, and public safety is an issue (guidance from the National Access Forum is available).

Communication between neighbours should be sufficient to ensure that anyone potentially affected by fencing changes will be informed. Common sense can now be used to help avoid or resolve conflicts and a form of mediation can be usefully applied. The Mar Lodge Estate independent deer management review is a good example of the success of facilitated wide-ranging consultation.

The effectiveness of fencing and other methods to protect and enhance deer habitats needs to be measured. This is done by SNH on designated sites and increasingly by DMGs. Monitoring of woodland expansion is also a measure. Private estates have the opportunity to demonstrate improvements in habitat through joining the Wildlife Estates Initiative. It was generally felt that big improvements to designated sites had been achieved in the park through reduced deer densities but more measurement is needed, though opinions on the best methods and criteria for assessment differ. Other factors such as grazing pressure from other herbivores and climate change must be considered too.

#### ***Actions for CDAG/DMGs/CNPA:***

a) Provide information for the public on why deer fences are necessary and their pros and cons. The CNPA website could be used.

- b) Map existing, new and redundant fences in the Park in order to
- determine the ranges of deer herds in the Park and what area and quality of land is available to them (some DMGs are already doing this)
  - provide information useful for the co-ordinated planning and management of fences

The effects of public access on the ranges of deer could also be assessed.

#### **4. Deer- Vehicle Collisions**

A presentation was given by Jochen Langbein, National Deer-Vehicle Collisions Project, <http://www.deercollisions.co.uk/>

Traffic is predicted to increase by 22% in next 15 years. 509 deer vehicle collisions (DVCs) in the Cairngorms National Park in the last decade, ranging from 35 – 85 per year. Jochen provided a valuable insight into international approaches to tackling deer collisions.

A deer vehicle collision reduction strategy for Cairngorms National park might include e.g.

- Driver awareness e.g. Interactive signs
- Public DVC awareness e.g. seasonal media;
- Posters
- Verge management esp. junctions / slip roads
- Fencing – if leading to safer crossing points
- Adapt / enhance existing crossing structures
- Enforcement of speed limits, traffic calming
- Co-ordinated deer control
- Wildlife DeerDeter (trial -?)

Jochen Langbein's presentation will be available in the CDAG web pages: <http://cairngorms.co.uk/look-after/deer/cdag>

The following points were raised during discussion:

More information is needed on the species of deer involved in collisions, ie ratio of Red to Roe deer. This is often not recorded in reports and could affect mitigation options. More research is also needed on hotspots identified by the project, eg ground-truthing and investigating causes. This could be done through a student project.

There are huge cost implications. £1.7million is the official cost figure used for DVCs involving human fatalities. The average where human injury is involved is £75,000.

Salt spread on roads attracts deer. Roadside deer fences can cause collisions by trapping deer on the road. Newly seeded grass verges in areas of recent roadworks can attract deer due to the good grazing, however SNH have developed a seed mix to discourage deer from grazing verges.

The Lowland Deer Network Scotland was set up under ADMG in Nov 2011. Public safety is one of its main concerns as increasing deer collisions are anticipated, and ways to address this are being looked at.

SNH are responsible for ensuring that deer do not become a threat to public safety, and are therefore sponsoring the DVC project. The future of the project beyond 2012/13 is dependent on continued funding. Input from landowners is very important to its success. East Grampian DMG are already promoting the collection of data on collisions and data from all DMGs would be very valuable.

The legal standing of deer collisions is complex and case-specific, and no one body is legally responsible.

Deer collisions are easy to report on the following website:  
<http://deeraware.com/index.php/research/incident-report>

***Actions for CDAG/DMGs/CNPA:***

- a) Encourage members of all DMGs to collect and submit data on collisions.
  
- b) Raise awareness of deer collisions and recommend to all relevant Government and other agencies that deer collision risk is taken into account in planning, especially in relation to woodland management and roads.
  
- c) Inform plans for the dualling of the A9 to ensure management of deer collision risk is fully addressed.

**5. Date of next meeting**

March 2013 – tbc.

Many thanks to the speakers and Mar Lodge Estate staff for hosting the meeting.

## Mar Lodge Estate Field Visit

In the afternoon, David Frew (Manager, Mar Lodge Estate) led a visit up onto Carn an Leth-allt to view the new strategic deer fence which runs from the Linn of Dee up towards Sgòr Dubh. The lower section of the fence in the forest is 'offset electric' in order to reduce the likelihood of bird strikes. The top end of the fence is dog-legged to discourage deer from moving eastwards into the 'regeneration zone'. Extensive consultation took place on the exact line of the fence to minimise any landscape, access issues etc and to maximise the chances of its success.

The fenceline had been considered prior to the independent review, but has been put in place following the review in order to protect the Mar Lodge Estate and neighbouring estates' deer stalking resource. David stressed that the fence was not required to enable woodland regeneration which is already being successfully achieved. Whilst this fence amounts to roughly four kilometres in length, thirteen kilometres of redundant deer fences on the estate have recently been removed.



Mar lodge estate manager David Frew explains the new strategic deer fence (visible towards the top left).

More images from the field visit below:



